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ABSTRACT

Berger & Calabrese's theory of social interaction includes the notion that on meeting people for the first time, we make certain (proactive) attributions about them which predicts the alternative behaviours and beliefs they are likely to manifest or hold. These and other strategies are adopted in order to reduce interpersonal uncertainty apparent in initial encounters. The present paper reports on three preliminary studies which suggest that another's speech patterns afford us valuable information for formulating such proactive attributions. More specifically, the studies were concerned with the social significance of various forms of female taperecorded speech in Britain. It was found that people can stereotype women as androgynous and feminist. Among the latter are those more committed than others, on the basis of accent and paralinguistic features of voice. Further avenues of research are suggested with regard to interpersonal communication with women which tests, and perhaps may extend, Berger & Calabrese's theory. (Author/MFD)

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WOMEN SPEAKING : THE VOICES OF PERCEIVED ANDROGYNY AND FEMINISM

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When we form first impressions of strangers, we do so on the basis of a large number of interacting cues such as dress style, voice, facial appearance, perceived attributes, etc. Without wishing to become involved in any debate concerning the differential effectiveness of these various cues in certain contexts, our focus is on the role of another's speech style in forming a first impression, that is, how something is said rather than what is said. Previous work conducted suggests that the more prestigiously a person speaks, the more favourably he will be judged by others on certain dimensions (see review, Giles & Powesland, 1975). But notice that we have equated "the speaker" with "he" and "him"; in fact, most of us do so when speaking and writing (Bodine, 1975). Much of the work across the world, although attempting to define how speech style has been used to evaluate people, has all too easily fallen into the trap of actually determining how we react to men. This would seem to be crucial problem given, as mentioned in the previous paper (Elyan, 1977), that differences do seem to be apparent in the way men and women are spoken of (Lakoff, 1973; Martyna, in press), are expected to speak (Kramer, in press), and in the content and expression of what they actually have to say (Thorne & Henley, 1975). Our paper then is a preliminary attempt to redress the androcentric bias in the social evaluation of speech style and determine the salience of a woman's voice in forming impressions of her. It is our aim also to place this research within the context of a current theory of interpersonal relations.

Before describing our studies, let us introduce the framework we will be adopting. Berger & Calabrese (1975) devised a theoretical formulation for understanding the development of interpersonal relationships and it is our view that the study of first impressions may be usefully placed within this context. These workers accord the notion of "uncertainty" a central role in their theory. They argue that when two strangers meet for the first time their uncertainty levels are high in the sense that they are initially doubtful about the alternative behaviours and beliefs the other is likely to manifest or hold, and consequently, are uncertain themselves as to how to behave appropriately. Berger and Calabrese propose that acquaintainship is concerned with reducing such uncertainty so that once the other is perceived to be more predictable, a decision can be made about the likelihood of future interactions, and the probable intimacy of them.

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In order to reduce uncertainty in first encounters, interactants need to elaborate a basis for predicting the other's behaviours and attitudes. Berger & Calabrese argue that these predictions, called "proactive attributions", are made early on in the interaction based on input cues from the situation and the behaviour of the other. Naturally enough, uncertainty reduction is a continuously developing process, and the construction of proactive attributions is but one of the strategies Berger proposes interactants adopt to increase predictability (Berger, in press). In short, we see first impressions formed (and stereotypes evoked) in order to reduce cognitive uncertainty and thereby guide appropriate behaviour in social interaction.

Speech style has been shown cross-culturally to be used in the formation of proactive attributions (Giles, in press; Giles & St. Clair, in press). A person's speech rate, voice quality, pitch range and so forth can all be used as cues in gaining first impressions of others (see Giles & Powesland, 1975). Regional accent, as one aspect of speech style, appears to be an important cue to social evaluation in Britain. Previous work conducted in this country (United Kingdom) shows that the more of a standard accent speakers adopt, the more intelligent, competent, self-confident but admittedly less trustworthy and socially attractive we will judge them to be (Giles, 1971; Bourhis, Giles & Lambert, 1975), the better will be the perceived quality of their message (Giles, 1973; Powesland & Giles, 1975), and the more we will cooperate with them (Giles, Baker & Fielding, 1975; Bourhis & Giles, 1976). In other words, in many social contexts we are not only predicting the likely background and attributes of individuals from their accent, but also modifying our behaviour towards them accordingly. Given that the vast majority of this work highlighted reactions to male speakers, the question remains as to how people use accent as a means of making proactive attributions when encountering <u>women</u> for the first time.

As a first step in exploring this issue, we together with Olwen Elyan and Richard Bourhis (Elyan, Smith, Giles & Bourhis, in press), devised a study using the matched-guise technique (Lambert, 1967) which required 76 Bristol students to listen to and rate a series of people we had tape-recorded reading a standard passage of prose. The stimulus voices on this tape included those prepared by two bidialectal, middle class women who were able to read realistically the same passage in a standard accent and in their local Lancashire accents. They read the passage in both guises attempting to maintain the same speech rate, paralinguistic features and impression of temperament throughout. An independent sample of over 100

students validated the authenticity of these Standard and Lancashire guises. Other male and female voices were recorded for inclusion on the tape in order to disguise the fact that some of the speakers appeared twice. The voices were then randomly arranged together with a practice voice onto the stimulus tape. The study was introduced to listeners in what has now become a standard fashion. They were told by a female investigator that we were interested in determining whether people can infer characteristics from others on the basis of just listening to their voices; a task analogous to listening to unseen speakers on the radio. No mention was made of course to our interest in regional accent or to women. Each voice was listened to and rated separately on 25 rating scales chosen on the basis of current research on voice evaluation, sex trait stereotyping and sex role ideology (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Williams, Giles, Edwards, Best and Daws, 1977; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974).

Two-way ANOVAs with the factors of accent of speaker and sex of listener were performed on each of the scales. Main effects for accent of speaker emerged on 18 of these (all $p_s \leq .01$). Listeners considered the standard speakers to be significantly higher in self-esteem, to be clearer, more fluent, intelligent, self-confident, adventurous, independent, feminine and less weak than the regional accented women. In addition, standard speakers were more likely to be perceived to have a job which was well-paid and prestigious and have an egalitarian relationship with their spouse in the home, but less likely to have children than the Northern accented speakers. At the same time, regional speakers were perceived to be more sincere and likeable, and less aggressive and egotistic than their standard accented counterparts. Accent of speaker interacted significantly with sex of listener on six of the scales ($p_s < .01$) found to be due to female listeners polarizing their ratings of the speakers indicated by the main effects.

In summary, standard accented women were upgraded in terms of competence and communicative skills, but downgraded in terms of social attractiveness and personal integrity relative to regional accented females. Such data corroborate the stereotypes associated with male speakers previously. Perhaps more interestingly, however, standard accented women were expected to bear fewer children, to create a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands and they were seen to be more masculine in their sex traits, both positive and negative (Williams, et al., 1977), while at the same were rated higher on the femininity trait than Northern accented females. While being extremely cautious about the generality of these findings with regard to other regional accents in other British communities, the data suggest a

stereotyped picture of standard accented women as highly competent, articulate, lacking in warmth, masculine in certain ways and yet feminine, and espousing egalitarian ideals between the sexes. Interestingly, this profile is highlighted more by women than by men.

At first sight, the results may seem contradictory in the sense that standard accented women are seen as both highly masculine on certain traits and yet definitely high on the femininity scale as well. Recent research on psychological androgyny (Bem, 1974), which will be discussed in succeeding papers (Smith, 1977; J. Giles, 1977), suggests that these data are amenable to an interesting, yet speculative, interpretation. A number of workers have measured masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions allowing the expression of both characteristics in individuals of either sex. These studies have found that between 30 and 45% of some American college populations score high on both masculinity and femininity scales (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974; Bem, 1975). These individuals, displaying what has been termed psychological androgyny, represent themselves as being strongly masculine in certain ways and strongly feminine in others. It has been suggested that androgynous persons have a wider behavioural repertoire from which to choose enabling them to cope with the demands of a wide range of social, and often stressful, situations (J. Giles, 1977). Given this, it is not perhaps surprising to propose that people may be able to perceive both masculine and feminine qualities in the behaviour of others. Tentatively then, one could label the female standard accent as a "perceived voice of androgyny".

In Britain and in the United States, it has been found that women more frequently adopt prestigious pronunciation patterns than men (Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974) and our data may shed some light on why this may happen. In a recent pilot investigation, we replicated the study with male voices and found that male standard accented speakers were not androgynously perceived. Hence, women may reap more social rewards for assuming a standard accent than men; it allows them to emphasize their femininity while at the same time, they are perceived as possessing certain valued masculine characteristics as well. Future work on the causal agents of androgyny, perceived and actual, will likely help us clarify why the female standard voice might be stereotyped in an androgynous fashion. In addition, we need to determine what listeners construe to be dimensions of the scale "femininity" in less socially-sterile laboratory settings. We would also be interested to determine the linguistic characteristics of actual androgynous and non-androgynous males and females (cf. Smith, 1977).

At any rate, the study has suggested that accent could well be an important basis for stereotyped proactive attributions about the probable behaviours and attitudes that women manifest and hold. Regional accent is, however, only one, albeit important, aspect of a woman's speech style that may be a potential source for making first impressions; there may be many others. Yet, rather than move limply from one linguistic feature to another and determine its social meaning for listeners, we were compelled to return to our theoretical model and attempt another approach. It may be recalled that Berger & Calabrese (1975) propose that we make proactive attributions in order to reduce cognitive uncertainty about another's background, attitudes and beliefs. Thus, it would seem important to ask the question: what are people most concerned with reducing uncertainty about when meeting women for the first time? Obviously, an answer would necessarily be contextually-specific, and would require a large-scale factor analytic study to come to any important conclusions. However, in an informal pilot study, we asked students what characteristics they would be looking out for initially when meeting a young woman casually for the first time. As you might expect, there were many idiosyncratic replies, but one feature mentioned by almost everybody was the extent to which the target female was affiliated with feminist ideals. This appeared to both sexes to be quite an important factor to predict in these times of a changing relationship between the sexes so that they could guide their self-presentations more effectively. If then speech style is a potential medium for proactive attributions in any meaningful theoretical sense, we would have to determine whether womens' voices do allow listeners to make inferences about their profeminist views. In other words, if feminism is a salient dimension on which to reduce uncertainty, then it is important to determine if speech style cues are used for this purpose.

With this in mind, we designed a study with Caroline Browne to determine whether listeners perceive differences in the speech of "feminist" and "nonfeminist" women, and whether these differences are evaluatively meaningful. Twenty-four university undergraduates were interviewed and taperecorded in their own homes by a female investigator. After the interview, which was concerned with discussing a so-called "trivial" topic (clothing and fashion) and a more "serious" topic (Margaret Thatcher as the first female Prime Minister of Great Britain), the informants were administered the Spence, Helmreich & Stapp (1973) "Attitudes Towards Women Scale". A low score on this scale indicates that the informant accepts the inferior role of women in relation to men whereas a high score reflects a great deal of dissatisfaction with the unequal treatment of women in society. Sixteen of these women scored low and

these will be referred to as the "nonfeminist" group, while eight scored relatively high and these will be referred to as the "feminist" group. A further eight were subsequently interviewed who were known to be actively involved in the local Women's Movement; they scored no differently from the other so-called feminist women on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale. The inclusion of this subgroup was not only to increase the size of the feminist group interviewed, but also to investigate the relationship between membership, or active commitment, to the Women's Movement and their speech. In other words, if differences were perceived between the speech styles of feminist and non-feminist women, would they be accentuated in the eight who were active members of the Movement? The interviewer told the informants that she was interested in eliciting their views on topics of current interest, and no mention was made of our concerns with speech style or feminism.

From each of the 32 interviews, the first 30 seconds of the informants' speech on each of the two topics discussed were edited out. These 64 extracts were then randomly placed onto a stimulus tape which was played to sixteen, linguistically-untrained male and female students who were asked to rate each extract on a number of speech-related and personality scales chosen on the basis of previous research (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles, Bourhis, Gadfield, Davies & Davies, 1976; Bourhis & Giles, 1977). Each scale was submitted to a three-way ANOVA with the factors of feminist group, sex of listener and topic discussed. The results showed that irrespective of topic, feminist speakers were rated as significantly more profeminist**, as having a higher lucidity of argument** and as seeming more intelligent* and sincere*. Nonfeminist speakers were rated as sounding more frivolous**, superficial* and as having more standard accents". No important effect emerged for sex of listener or topic discussed and no interactions appear worthy of mention. Within the feminist group of speakers, another set of ANOVAs showed significant differences between the two subgroups. The "committed" feminist speakers, those active in the Women's Movement, were rated as more lucid**, confident**, intelligent**, likeable* and sincere**, but less monotonous* and superficial** than the "uncommitted" feminist speakers.

These findings demonstrate the importance of speech style in mediating between social attitudes and social perception. The speech and personalities of feminist

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*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

and nonfeminist speakers are seen to differ (at least among British college women) in interesting ways, as are indeed those of the committed and uncommitted subgroups. The picture emerges of the feminist speaker as a lucid, intelligent person, confident and sincere in what she is saying, and as we would expect, perceived to be profeminist. In contrast, the nonfeminist speaker sounds more superficial and frivolous even when talking about politics. It is interesting to note that the nonfeminist speakers were judged to have more standard accents too. The differences between the committed and uncommitted feminist seem of the same order as well in that the more committed to a liberationist viewpoint a woman is, the more accentuated the profile becomes.

This study, however, involved the recording of spontaneous speech and hence any differences arising from the analysis might be due simply to the content of what was said rather than to the speech style. From listening to the tapes, this did not seem to us to be the case. Therefore, with Sarah Whiteman, we repeated the study but this time using content-controlled material with a larger group of listeners. Five female students who scored high on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (the feminist speakers), and five who scored low (the nonfeminist speakers) were recorded reading a neutral passage of prose which they rated subsequently as neither masculine nor feminine, pro- nor anti-feminist, and was interesting and not difficult to read; these speakers were not in fact used in the previous investigation. Forty linguistically-unsophisticated, male and female students listened to these voices and rated them on more or less the same scales as previously. This time, a pilot study was conducted to determine the test-retest reliability of the speech-related scales, and all the correlations were highly significant.

ANOVAs on the ratings showed once again that differences were perceived between the speech styles of feminist and nonfeminist women. Feminist speakers were perceived to be less fluent** and standard accented**, lower in pitch*, less precisely enunciated*, more masculine* and less feminine-sounding* than the nonfeminist speakers. In this formal reading context, the voice of feminism appeared to be at a social disadvantage in the sense that such speakers were rated as less intelligent* than the nonfeminist women. It does seem then that even when the content of what is said is controlled for, people can still detect differences in the speech style of feminist and nonfeminist women. One obvious interpretation of these findings is that feminist students may be assimilating towards, or assuming, certain aspects of the speech of the dominant group in society, perhaps in an attempt to share in its social power (Giles & Giles, in press). In this sense, it would be interesting to monitor feminists' speech patterns during the course of naturally-occurring changes in their social

identities, policies and actions. Nevertheless, other quite potent alternative explanations for these differences can be proposed. First, it is possible that the speech style characterizing feminist women is in actual fact that associated with females who are committed to some issue, whether it be environmental pollution, child health care, anti-abortionism or whatever. Rather than the "voice of feminism", we might have the "voice of commitment". Second, it could be that feminist and nonfeminist views are simply components of two larger sociopolitical belief structures such as for example liberalism and conservatism respectively. In such a case, we would expect the same speech style differences just described to distinguish between other ideological parameters - perhaps even among men. These are issues worthy of empirical attention, and it would be valuable in future research to determine how the feminist voice (and perhaps its concomitant nonverbal behaviour patterns) is perceived by others across a wide range of personality and social attributes.

We have tried to make women a proper subject of first impression in their own right rather than as an adjunct to males. In this vein, we have suggested that, on the basis of admittedly exploratory data, a woman's voice can provide her interactants with a rich source of data from which to make proactive attributions about her background, personality and social attitudes. It seems possible that on the basis of voice cues alone, people will make inferences about a woman's psychological androgyny and her feminist perspective. Obviously, it needs to be determined how these proactive attributions are translated into behavioural responses by different types of interactants in different situations, and how these are responded to in return by women.

Our theoretical startingpoint has been to consider speech style cues in a framework of impression formation where they are one source of information useful in reducing cognitive uncertainty about another. Implicit in our paper has been the notion that this framework may provide the much needed integration for the various person perceptual cues we use to formulate first impressions. It seems to us that determining the effect of dress, voice, face, etc. in isolation from one another, or even in combination, is ultimately theoretically sterile. An alternative approach that we intend to promote is to determine what dimensions of cognitive uncertainty interactants are seeking to reduce in different situations, and to determine how these dimensions are marked in others by facial expression, voice, dress and so forth. In this way, we can build up a coherent picture of the role of first impressions for men and women, not only in the immediacy - and perhaps transience - of the initial encounter, but also in the wider context of a developing relationship.

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